

CAMBODIA: THE HUMAN IMPACT OF FOREST CONFLICT

ACTUAL CONFLICT OVER FOREST RESOURCES IS INCREASING IN CAMBODIA AND THE RATE OF INCREASE APPEARS LIKELY TO ACCELERATE OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS.



The land upon which forest grow in Cambodia is becoming increasingly valuable for both subsistence and commercial agriculture.

This brief document summarizes the findings of the report *Cambodia: An Assessment of Forest Conflict at the Community Level* with additional information about the number of people affected.

The vast majority of Cambodians live in rural areas, earning their livelihoods through agriculture and depending on natural resources for daily needs and as an economic safety net. Indigenous communities living in the forested uplands are almost totally dependent on forest resources and forestland. Resource tenure is still insecure despite initial steps by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to provide legal guarantees. The current situation of legal uncertainty has encouraged land grabbing by the elites in Cambodian society as well as encroachment on forestland by the landless. Forest and wildlife resources are being lost steadily through legal and illegal harvesting at a range of scales. These trends are causing conflict between the communities that rely on land and resources for their livelihoods and the outsiders that are seizing them for agriculture, tree plantations, or speculation.

Natural resource conflict is an important development issue in Cambodia because it is very closely related to government efforts to reduce poverty and improve governance. Yet, forest resources are often an unofficial source of income for civil government officials and the military. The next few years will be a pivotal period for improving natural resource governance as a means to reduce conflict, fight poverty, and avoid human rights abuses. This document summarizes the findings of the report **Cambodia: An Assessment of Forest Conflict at the Community Level** with additional information from a recent estimate of the number of people affected. The assessment is intended to provide an overview of forest-related conflict in Cambodia to help the RGC, USAID, other donors, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to take effective steps to avoid or mitigate conflict. It is also intended to identify important lessons learned from the Cambodia experience that can be applied more broadly in Asia.

Actual conflict over forest resources and forestland is increasing in Cambodia and the rate of increase appears likely to accelerate over the next several years unless steps are taken to reduce the underlying and direct causes of conflict.

The ability to reduce conflict has important implications for the RGC's efforts to reduce poverty and improve governance in the country. Conflicts caused by land grabbing, encroachment, and land concessions are increasing rapidly, while those driven by timber harvesting have been reduced because of a ban on logging and the fact that much of the most valuable and accessible timber has already been harvested. The primary locus of conflict has shifted from forest resources to land. Issues related to forest and land conflict are multidimensional, usually complex, and cannot be addressed in isolation from larger issues of governance, natural resource management, national economic development, rural development, land tenure/forest resource access, and poverty alleviation.

What is forest conflict? Conflict over forest resources at the community level can occur in many forms, at many levels of severity, and between various parties. The assessment focused on situations where forest-related conflict resulted in violence, human rights abuses, or denial of access to natural resources to an extent that significantly diminished the welfare of the rural poor. There are many causes of forest conflict in Cambodia, including legal and illegal logging, land grabbing, and encroachment, as discussed later in this document. Most forest conflict in the 1990s was caused by logging that was sanctioned by the government and was therefore legal in the strict sense. However, the concessions were in conflict with the existing use and survival needs of forest communities, which were not taken into account when concessions were awarded.

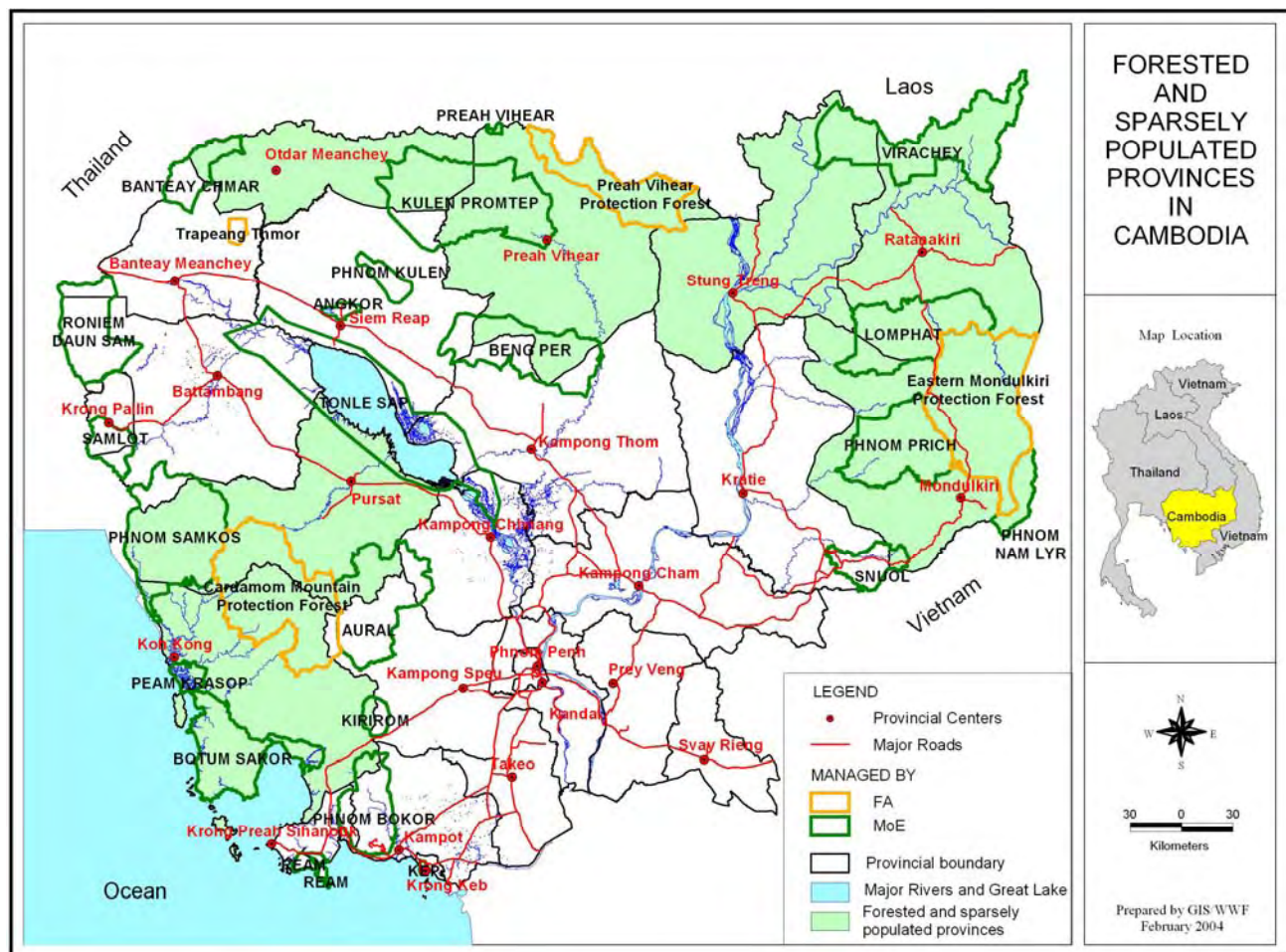
The Context of Forest Conflict in Cambodia

Forest conflict must be viewed from the perspective of Cambodia's recent history and trends in economic and social conditions in rural areas, including:

- Cambodia's 30-year history of warfare and violence has led to massive displacement of rural people and destruction of property records.
- The majority of Cambodians live in rural areas below or near the poverty line, struggling to earn their livelihoods through subsistence agriculture. A significant proportion of families are landless or nearly so.
- The population is growing rapidly with the age distribution heavily skewed toward children and young adults.
- Weak governance of land and natural resources is exploited by the powerful and politically well connected, who take possession of land and natural resources or send proxies to clear forestland.
- The forest and land concession systems have thus far failed to meet the real need to use rural land and natural resources to promote economic growth and provide rural jobs. They have instead diminished livelihood options for the rural poor and degraded natural resources while failing to capture economic benefits for the nation.
- Degradation of common or community property resources has weakened the traditional social safety net.
- Most ethnic minority forest communities are unable to defend their land or forest use rights due to their marginal status in Khmer society, widespread illiteracy and poor understanding of the Khmer language, lack of knowledge of the law, and self-perceived powerlessness in the face of the authority figures or outsiders.

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in Asia with a per capita gross national income of US \$297 and was ranked 130th on the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Index in 2003. Approximately 36% of the population lives below the poverty line. In a nation where 85% of the population lives in rural areas, with 63% earning their living by subsistence agriculture, more land is needed to accommodate young families each year. The stage is set for forest conflict as population growth, landlessness, and lack of alternative income opportunities are pushing poor people out of the rice-growing lowlands to settle in forest areas, putting them in conflict with indigenous forest communities. Forest communities are also competing for land and resources with land grabbers and land concessionaires, who are also converging on the forest-rich upland provinces.

Sparsely populated, forested uplands are located in the east and north of the country, particularly in the provinces of Mondulakiri, Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, and Oddar Meanchay, and in the Cardamom Mountains in the southwest, within Koh Kong and Pursat Provinces (see map).



The forested uplands are home to an ethnically diverse group of people, including Khmer and ethnic minorities. As is the case in the lowlands, forest farmers cannot grow enough rice to last the entire year, and usually rely heavily on collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) to provide food, building materials, cash to buy rice and other household necessities, and funds to meet family emergencies.

The disparity in population density between the lowlands and forested uplands is stark. For land poor lowlanders, the forested uplands appear to offer a wealth of underutilized land and resources, a view shared by entrepreneurs and the government. Landless lowlanders are attracted to the resource frontier provinces where land and resources are seemingly abundant, putting them into conflict with the people who already live there.

The Nature and Use of Cambodia's Forests

Forest is estimated to cover 10 million ha of Cambodia, approximately 60% of the nation's land area. There are a diversity of forest types reflecting various combinations of rainfall, soil type, elevation, and human disturbance. Most of the remaining forest has been disturbed to some degree, much of it is degraded, and forest clearance is increasing. Virtually all of Cambodia's forests have been disturbed by shifting cultivation, logging, fires, and warfare. Over the last decade it has become apparent that Cambodia's forests are finite and are rapidly being depleted. Like a game of musical chairs, the various groups of players are trying to lay claim to one of the remaining forest areas while the rules of the game remain weakly enforced and unknown to the least powerful players. As forests are degraded and converted to other uses, demands on remaining forestlands and resources are escalating, creating an environment conducive to greater conflict over forests and the land they grow on.

A fast-growing, young, rural population has surpassed the carrying capacity of the nation's lowland rice-growing areas, creating a large number of landless and land poor people who are attracted to sparsely populated forests, already degraded by three decades of unmanaged logging. Powerful people, entrepreneurs, and agricultural settlers have strong incentives and few constraints to grabbing or encroaching on forestlands. Forest communities typically lack the political power, knowledge, and resources to contest takeovers. The structure of a legal framework for forestland allocation is in place, but the means, capacity, and will to implement it remain weak. Allocation decisions are made without any real effort to evaluate competing uses based on economic, social, or environmental criteria. In an effort to conserve remaining areas of forest, the RGC has designated approximately 30% of the country as protected areas,¹ in some cases creating conflicts with communities over forest resource access. A protected area system covering 3.3 million ha was established under the management of the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and additional areas of Protection Forest have been declared by the Forestry Administration.

Between 1994 and 1997, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) awarded more than 30 forest concessions covering 6.5 million ha. Logging was conducted during the mid-1990s on a massive scale, with virtually no concern for sustainable management or impacts on the environment and local communities. The forest concessions had an enormous impact on the lives and livelihoods of people living in or near them. The concessionaires viewed the forest resources within the concessions as their property and routinely hired armed guards, including police and military personnel, to guard the concessions, resulting in intimidation of local people that frequently included violence. Communities were affected even after logging was halted because important resources, particularly resin trees, were either depleted or totally lost and the overall quality of the forest was degraded. Roads cut into the forest for log extraction provide continuing access for illegal loggers and agricultural settlers, both of which continue to threaten the livelihoods of local people.

¹ This includes the flooded area of the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) which covers about 8% of Cambodia's land area.

The Legal Framework for Forest and Land Management

The combined effect of the weak observance of the rule of law, the incentive to harvest forest resources and claim forestland, and the inability of traditional users to gain recognition of and defend their use rights creates a climate for conflict. Among these, the most serious and difficult to address is the failure to enforce laws that allocate and protect forest resource access rights in a transparent, rational, and equitable manner.

The legal framework for allocating and managing Cambodia's forest resources and forestlands were recently put into place and the remaining structural elements are being formulated. The two key pieces of legislation are the Land Law approved in 2001 and the Forestry Law approved in 2002. These laws are in the process of being elaborated through sub-decrees that clarify specific provisions of the laws and *prakas*, which are implementation guidelines issued by the responsible ministry. The procedures and criteria for land classification and allocation spelled out in the sub-decrees and *prakas* will determine how difficult it will be for communities to obtain land and forest use rights, which will largely determine how much conflict there will be in the future.

Local government has an important role to play in reducing community-level forest conflict, and provincial governments have in fact done so in some cases, most notably the provincial government of Ratanakiri. A law has been passed describing the responsibilities of the newly formed commune councils, but there is as yet no law that states the roles of provincial and district government or their relationship with sectoral ministries.

The Causes of Forest and Land Conflict

Conflicts over forest resources in Cambodia result from direct causes that are driven by multiple underlying causes related to the following enabling factors:

Enabling Factors of Conflict

- Timber is valuable and relatively easily harvested and sold in relation to other natural resources, making logging an attractive source of cash to a wide range of groups including the military, government officials, and businessmen. Ready markets for timber exist in neighboring countries.
- The land upon which the forests grow is becoming increasingly valuable for both subsistence and commercial agriculture.
- The landless have nothing to lose and much to gain from encroaching on forestland.
- Communities that most depend on forest resources make up a relatively small portion of the national population and have very little power because they are socially, linguistically, and politically marginalized.

Direct Causes of Conflict

- **Land grabbing** (the illegal appropriation of land) is taking place at a wide variety of spatial scales.
- Agricultural settlers are **encroaching** on forestland.
- **Economic land concessions** have major impacts on forest communities in terms of reducing or eliminating access to both forest resources and forestland.
- **Forest concessions** have been put on hold by the logging moratorium, leaving a management vacuum that in many cases is being filled by illegal loggers and agricultural migrants.

- **Illegal timber and NTFP harvesting** is a chronic and difficult to control source of conflict.
- **Forest use restrictions related to protected area management and protection forest** have mixed results for communities living in or near protected areas. In some cases, protected area status has reduced illegal encroachment and harvesting by outsiders, while in others it has not. Enforcement of protected area regulations also places restrictions on forest use by communities, or may simply create uncertainty over what their rights are within protected areas.

Underlying Causes of Conflict

- **Weak governance**, caused by uncertainty over the evolving legal framework and role of provincial and lower levels of government in land and natural resource management, the weak enforcement capacity and will to enforce by government agencies, little judicial involvement in land and forest cases, and no effective extra-judicial mechanism to settle land and resource conflicts. Weak governance is also related to the following three causes:
 - **Forest communities** in most cases do not understand their rights and are unable to defend them.
 - **Forest use classification and comprehensive land use planning** for forest areas has not yet been started as required by the 2002 Forestry Law. Forestland and resource allocation decisions continue to be made on an ad hoc basis without consideration of the full range of forest values for actual and potential uses.
 - **Economic incentives** for illegally harvesting timber and grabbing forestland are enormous since much can be gained with a small investment risking little chance of prosecution. The military has a particular incentive because their personnel are poorly paid, field units have limited operational funds, there is an excess of armed soldiers in rural areas, and military units have a history of financial dependence on forest resources.
- **A growing population of young, landless people** who have limited employment and livelihood options in their home areas are increasingly attracted to encroaching on forestland.
- **Forest access has been improved** by the extension and upgrading of the nation's primary road network including major links with neighboring countries providing easy access to remote forest areas and a means to move timber quickly. Forest roads that were built by concessions and have been abandoned now provide forest access for spontaneous migrants, commercial agriculture firms, and illegal loggers.
- **Social Concession Sub-Decree** could cause conflict if landless people are settled in forest areas without adequate prior planning and mitigation measures.

How Are Cambodians Affected by Forest Conflict?

The following four statements by forest-dependent Cambodians provide insight into how various groups perceive that they are being affected by conflict over forest resources and land and what some have then done in response². The final statement is by the government minister responsible for land management, stating the severity of land conflict as reflected in the number of cases that have been brought to the government for resolution.

² Seven additional forest conflict case studies are contained in the report *Cambodia: An Assessment of Forest Conflict at the Community Level* by ARD, Inc. on behalf of USAID.



At a workshop on indigenous people's right in Ratanakiri last month, high-ranking officials asked if the Stieng wanted development assistance to reduce poverty in our communities. I replied:

Development can be good, in that it generates employment and reduces poverty. But our people do not want it. We find that when there is a development project [e.g., forest concessions], the forest then belongs to companies, and our access to the forest is denied. The companies cut trees and occupy all the land.

The companies hire us only when we are young, healthy, and strong. Once we grow older, or become ill, they do not take care of us or hire us. Then we have nothing left to survive on; and we will become even poorer.

Although we are poor, we can still get food from the remaining forests. We do not have to pay to have access to the forest and harvest fruits, vegetables, herbs, nuts, leaves, etc. When we are self-employed, we have a great deal of freedom; we can go to the forest whenever we choose, and we can move around the forest at will. We do not have to ask for permission to take leave and when we are sick we just stay home. Freedom is important to us.

Once the companies own all the forests, then all of the forest will be gone. Our future generations—our children and grandchildren—will not have a chance to see a forest. Our communities rely on forests for housing and livelihoods. For example, we collect leaves for the roofs and small pieces of wood for poles and columns/pillars. If the forest is gone, what will we have? We will not have leaves and wood for our homes. We do not use tile and cement for our housing material. That will be too bad for us and we will be poorer.

Stieng ethnic woman group in Kratie (August 2005)

The poor are banned from logging the local forest for housing. Sometimes, we cannot even access non-timber forest products for our livelihood. However, military and police can do anything that they want with the forest. Traditionally, we used to collect some wood for housing and fuel; but not anymore. We want to collect wood for housing and fuel again. We do not clear cut our local forest, and for fuel we only collect small trees and/or twigs.

The military and police are logging illegally, but we cannot file complaints against them. If we do, we may be killed. Recently, an NGO told us that we could set up a community forest to protect our area. We have set one up informally, protecting our local forest from abuse, because we want to save the forest for both our own and our future generations' livelihoods. The community forest committee is supposed to patrol the forest and either report or lodge any complaints about forest abuse to the appropriate agencies. It is a hard work. When the committee reported on the forest situation in our area, one of its active members was shot, just a few days ago. One of his hands was handicapped (his wife was in mourning during the discussion). We are a small group, and they can do anything to harm us. Who would care?

Logging has continued in our area for more than seven years. If the central government and any of its agencies could help, we would ask them to halt the logging activities and maintain the rule of law. We want to have access to wood for our housing. We also want to have some forest left for our future generations' livelihoods. Without the forest how will they live and what could they live on?

Kuy ethnic communities in Preah Vihear (July 2005)



With support from USAID through ABiC during the period August 2004 to May 2005, our community network provided legal extension on the land and forest laws. Our network was able to patrol our forest regularly, curb illegal logging, and save resin-producing trees, which are important for our livelihoods.

Representatives of Community Forest Network in Kratie (August 2005)

A few years ago a foreign logging company started logging in the forest where we hunt for wild animals, chop down trees for our own use or to earn some money, and where we gather other things for our own use. Soldiers with guns were sent to tell us that we could not chop trees down in this area, and that if we did they would shoot us. To frighten us they fired their guns into the air and disappeared. From time to time these soldiers come through the village, searching underneath our houses for small logs and demanding food and drink.

Phnong ethnic communities in Mondulkiri (2001)

The Land and Cadastral Committee closed 829 cases of land conflicts. Four thousand people involved have filed complaints. Most of the land conflicts are caused by the powerful and rich who have abused the poor. The grabs of state land, even not affecting the poor, really show the abuse of power and authority in occupying land illegally for one's gain and ownership/possession, which sets bad examples and causes degradation of natural resources. For example, a fish habitat is lost due to the fact that mangrove forest was cleared and the shore was filled up.

H.E. Im Chhun Lim, Senior Minister and Minister of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction was quoted by *Koh Santepheap* Newspaper (September 10-11, 2005)

How Many Cambodians are Affected by Forest and Land Conflict?

Achieving an accurate count of the number of Cambodians affected by forest conflict would be an impossible task because:

- There is no generally accepted definition of forest conflict; and
- Conflict is under-reported and difficult to verify. Affected populations rarely report incidents because they are physically, politically, and linguistically isolated and usually don't understand their legal rights.

Indicators and proxies provide a means to estimate the number of people affected by forest conflict. We used the following four approaches to develop estimates of the number of people affected by forest conflict from the early 1990s until 2005.

Approach	Methodology	Assumptions	Results	Sources of Error
A. Aggregate population of villages inside forest concessions and protected areas	Map concessions and protected areas, identify village locations, and determine aggregate population in total and for areas known to have experienced conflict.	Concessions and protected areas cause conflict, affecting all people living in these areas.	1,516,958 total people affected, with 825,893 in problem areas.	People in these areas are affected at different levels off severity and conflicts happen over years, so there is variation in time period and degree of conflict
B. Estimate households (HH) that rely heavily on forest products	Use the World Bank estimate that 100,000 HH rely on harvesting resin for bulk of their livelihoods ³ multiplied by an average of 5.5 members in each rural HH	WB estimate is accurate	550,000 people affected	1. HH that are less forest dependent but still suffer from conflict not included 2. Average number of members per HH may be inaccurate
C. Estimate households that rely on forest products to some degree for their livelihoods	Compare survey results of 1,200 rural HH done as part of a land study conducted in 4 agro-ecological zones by the Agri-Business Institute Cambodia (ABiC) in 2004 with results of 120 focus group discussions conducted as part of the same study to estimate number of people who are forest dependent nationwide. 12.8% of survey respondents and 28.8% of focus group participants identified themselves as forest dependent. Use these percentages of the rural population to estimate total number of people affected, excluding areas that are not forested.	All forest dependent people suffer some form of forest conflict.	Survey: 761,764 people are affected Focus Group: 1,695,855 people affected	1. Errors in survey design or implementation. 2. The sampling system is not representative. 3. Population data and growth rates may not be accurate.
D. Estimate number of people living within 5 KM of a forest ⁴	Calculate 30% of the populations of rural provinces that have significant areas of forest and where forest conflict has been reported.	All forest dependent people suffer some form of forest conflict. 30% of rural people are forest dependent.	1,785,384 people affected.	1. 30 % may not be an accurate estimate of forest-dependent people. 2. Aggregating population at the province level could introduce error.

³ World Bank. 2004. *Cambodia Rural Sector Strategy Note: Towards a Rural Sector*.

⁴ The Independent Forest Sector Review of Cambodia, conducted in 2004, assumed that people living within 5 km of a forest are dependent on forest resources for at least 10% of their income and that this constitutes about 30% of the population.

Assumptions: We assumed that forest conflict is highly correlated with either living in or near forest concessions or protected areas (Approach A), or being dependent on forest resources for livelihood (Approaches B, C, and D). Approach C relies on self-identification of forest dependency derived from the results from rural surveys/focus groups. Approaches B and D assume that estimates of forest dependency made by the World Bank and a donor-supported independent review of the forest sector are realistic. Population data used in the analyses are from the Cambodia Population Census of 1998 and 2004, using a growth rate of 2.5% in the period 1990-1998 and 1.8% during the period 1999-2005. Approach A is the most sensitive to population growth calculations as it covers a period of over a decade.

Results: The results of these approaches provide a range of estimates of the number of people affected by forest conflict in Cambodia from a low of 550,000 people (if only people who derive the majority of their livelihoods from forests are counted), to over 1.7 million people (when people at lower levels of forest dependency are included or residence in or near forests is the basis for the calculation). The results of Approaches A, C, and D yielded very similar results using different sources of information, indicating that these estimates are probably in the correct order of magnitude. **The highest estimate represents approximately 12% of the population of Cambodia.**⁵

Limitations of the Results: Our approaches do not provide any insight into the number of people affected by various levels of severity of forest conflict, which can range from minor loss of livelihood resources to armed violence and death. These results do not tell us how the numbers of people affected by forest conflict have changed over the last decade or how the causes and locations of conflict have shifted over this period. We recognize that some percentage of the people who are counted as having been affected by conflict may be encroachers who have actually caused conflict with existing forest inhabitants. These limitations indicate that it is very desirable to ground truth our results through on-the-ground investigations at randomly selected sites in and near forested areas. This would provide insight into the accuracy of our numerical results and tell us more about the nuances of how people are affected by forest conflict.

The Nature of Forest Conflict and Approaches to Reducing It

There are several common scenarios for forest conflict at the community level in Cambodia. Most conflicts are with outsiders, but are sometimes with neighboring communities or within a community. In some cases the conflict is limited to forest resources and in others conflict includes both forest resources and land. Most of the scenarios are asymmetrical in that the communities have limited political and economic power in comparison to opposing groups in the conflict.

Conflicts between communities and outsiders over land and forest resources are viewed by many donors and NGOs as a fundamental rural development issue in Cambodia and major human rights and governance issues as well. There is broad recognition among those working on forest and land conflict that a comprehensive strategy comprised of a number of approaches is needed to successfully reduce forest and land conflicts. The following interventions must be part of this strategy:

⁵ A table showing the number of people affected by reported land conflicts and who live in areas affected by conflict, listed by village, may be accessed at the following website: <http://www.ardinc.com/projects/project.php?area=Regions&tid=270>.

- Finalize the national **legal and spatial planning framework** for allocating forest resource and land use/tenure rights. It is absolutely critical that forestland be comprehensively and rationally allocated in order to create a spatial framework within which to allocate forestland for community forestry, timber production, protection, conversion to other uses, and smallholder settlement.
- Instill **respect for the rule of law** regarding forest and land allocation, tenure, and use. Accelerate political reform to reduce corruption and political interference in administrative decisions and strengthen the judicial branch of government, which is currently very weak.
- Develop the **capacity of forest communities** to effectively demand their rights. A number of NGOs are helping communities to improve their capacity to understand and demand their forest use rights through education, empowerment, organization, networking, advocacy, and training. The Forest Network, comprised of local NGOs and forest communities and facilitated by the NGO Forum, acts as a mechanism for communities to report forest crimes and conflict, and coordinate with each other.
- Develop **mechanisms and procedures** for conferring tenure and use rights and assist the government to confer these rights. The ultimate means to halt community-level forest conflict is by legally protecting community land and forest use rights through community land titles combined with community forestry agreements.
- Improve **natural resource governance** at the province, district, and commune levels including detailed land use planning at the village and commune levels. The Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) methodology is a valuable tool and is now being modified for use in indigenous forest communities and communes.
- Avoid conflict before it occurs by **providing alternative livelihoods** for potential or actual land encroachers.
- Develop a system for **Monitoring and reporting forest crimes** and community-level conflict.

The Role of Government in Reducing Conflict

The role of the RGC in reducing forest conflict is clear, but will require considerable effort and political will to achieve. Necessary actions are:

- Complete the legal framework established by the Land Law and the Forestry Law, especially with regard to community land titling, community forestry, and forestland classification.
- Enforce and implement existing laws as well as the provisions of the Land and Forestry Laws.
- Begin and complete the process of nationwide forestland classification as soon as possible.
- Accelerate the review and approval of existing and pending community forests.
- Make a good faith effort to control land grabbing, encroachment, and illegal timber harvesting.
- Recognize and respect community land and forest use rights in the process of identifying and awarding economic land concessions.
- Clarify community forestland use rights in protected areas.
- Support the judiciary to uphold the law through the judicial reform process.

The Role of Donors and NGOs in Reducing Conflict

The combined donor and NGO community has played a large role in the dialogue over forest management in Cambodia and has also been actively involved in assisting forest communities through efforts to secure their rights to land and forest resources. These efforts must be continued and increased to take advantage of the legal framework that is now being put into place. Key actions include:

- Assist the Forestry Administration to expand community forestry nationwide.
- Facilitate the issuance of land titles for indigenous communities.
- Continue dialogue and advocacy with the RGC, emphasizing respect for the rule of law.
- Educate, organize, and empower communities to demand their rights.
- Continue/strengthen the Forest Network.

The Role of USAID in Reducing Conflict

USAID/Cambodia, through the following existing activities of implementing partners, contributes significantly to the effort to reduce forest conflict at the community level:

- The **Human Rights in Cambodia Project** (East-West Management Institute/American Bar Association) pursues “impact litigation” cases focusing on forest or land conflicts to raise the level of compliance with the rule of law. They will also train people in legal advocacy, using the media and lobbying.
- The **Community Forestry Alliance for Cambodia** (CFAC) brings strong regional and Cambodian expertise to community forestry and is assisting communities to establish community forests. CFAC is also working on policy and procedural aspects of implementing the Community Forestry Sub-Decree.
- The *Managing Conflict in Asian Forest Communities* (MCAFC) BIOFOR Task Order sponsored the **Workshop on Community Level Impacts of Forest and Land Conflicts in Mondulhiri** on 26 and 27 May 2004. The workshop gave forest communities the opportunity to explore their experiences with forest conflict, learn their forest and land rights, and develop a Draft Action Plan (DAP) to avoid and mitigate forest and land conflict in the province. MCAFC supported two NGOs to implement activities identified in the DAP, including educating indigenous communities about their forest and land rights and helping them to organize to protect these rights.

What Has been Learned in Cambodia That May be Applicable to Other Countries?

The nature of conflict over forest resources varies considerably among Asian countries, largely in relation to the extent and quality of the forest resource and the amount of pressure being put on it. These differences indicate that there can be no single blueprint for addressing forest conflict, but rather a toolbox of approaches that can be tailored to particular situations. It is clear that the multifaceted efforts now being employed to protect resource access and decrease conflict in Cambodia provide an important body of experience from which to draw lessons, if only preliminary ones. The overarching lesson from Cambodia is the importance of a comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of the problem including:

- A sound legal basis to protect forest resource and land rights;
- Political will and capacity of government to implement the laws;
- Respect for the rule of law in all sectors of society and support for the judiciary to uphold the law;
- Capacity of communities to demand their rights through education, organization, and empowerment;
- Mechanisms at the community level to monitor conflict and report this information to higher levels of government; and
- Technical and administrative skills to manage community forests.

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